CALLING THE SHOTS

around here anyway?

Faith Popcorn, chair and founder of BrainReserve, a marketing consultancy based in New York, reveals ten trends in American consumption in her latest book, *The Popcorn Report*. Here she summarizes what those trends mean to marketers in the 1990s.

by Faith Popcorn, CEO, BrainReserve

In the 1980s consumers seemed to move in hungry packs. All marketers had to do was wave some bait out the window, and soon enough the wolves of consumption would beat a path to their door. Manufacturers swore their innovation and ad campaigns were responsible for the rush. Retailers insisted their local reputation and direct contact with the consumer deserved the credit. Either way, consumers just took care of the spending.

Not so anymore. The 1990s, or the "Decency Decade," has opened with a round of nose-wrinkling and a chorus of "No thank you." Consumers, glutted with debt and burdened with a certain buyer's ennui, are much more finicky in their spending patterns. The truth is, now the consumer's calling the shots. These spending patterns, however, can be tracked in trends.

Webster defines a trend as a line of general direction or movement, a prevailing tendency or inclination. At BrainReserve we've embellished that just a bit. A trend must be observable across several market arenas and consumer activities. It must be consistent with other significant indicators occurring or emerging at the same time. It must have longevity. Smart marketers will track consumers and offer products and services that meet their needs.

Tracking consumer trends is easy if you just follow a few imperatives: Listen to consumers whenever, wherever you can. Read what consumers read. Watch what consumers watch. Hear what consumers hear. Shop the way consumers shop. Interpret consumer role models and heroes. Finally, understand special consumer groups.

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